

SCRATCHED: WORLD WAR II AIRBORNE OPERATIONS THAT NEVER HAPPENED

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

SCRATCHED: WORLD WAR II AIRBORNE OPERATIONS THAT NEVER HAPPENED by
MAJ John C. Gwinn, 44 pages.

In the first week of September, as the Allied drive across northern France and Belgium began to lose its momentum, General Dwight David Eisenhower directed the First Allied Airborne Army to develop plans for airborne operations that would ensure the Allies regained their momentum. As directed, airborne planners devised approximately eighteen different plans in forty days. Five plans reached the stage of detailed planning. Three progressed almost to the point of launching. None matured. The plans embraced a variety of objectives: the city of Tournai, to block Germans retreating from the Channel coast; the vicinity of Liege, to get the First Army across the Meuse River; the Aachen-Maastricht gap, to get Allied troops through the West Wall. For numerous reasons, the overall Allied airborne effort of World War II provided mixed results. Therefore, the Allies did not execute all of their planning efforts. Why did the Allies not use their airborne forces effectively during World War II? To answer that question, this monograph uses primary sources from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, as well as the Royal Netherlands Institute for Military History. Furthermore, this monograph uses numerous secondary sources from the Center of Military History. This monograph uses these primary, secondary, and additional sources to examine the early history, doctrine, planning, and ideology of World War II airborne operations. This monograph reveals that the Allies had little foundation in airborne operations, and therefore used deficient doctrine as well as inefficient planning to conduct their initial operations. Additionally, an ideological competition over the use of airborne resources hampered operational planning. Without a doubt, any future coalition will face many of the same obstacles that the Allies of World War II faced. In today's environment, the United States military can ill-afford to suffer the growing pains of World War II's Allies. To increase its probability of gaining access to denied areas, the future joint coalition must integrate its forcible entry doctrine, synchronize its planning efforts, and overcome the competing ideologies of its interdependent parts.

ACRONYMS

AG	Army Group
BG	Brigadier General
CARL	Combined Arms Research Library
CGSC	U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
FAAA	First Allied Airborne Army
FM	Field Manual
LTG	Lieutenant General
MG	Major General
MMAS	Master of Military Art and Science
RG	Record Group
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies
SCAEF	Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
TC	Training Circular

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INTRODUCTION

Where is the prince who can afford to cover his country with troops for its defense as that ten thousand men descending from the clouds, might not, in many places, do an infinite deal of mischief before a force could be brought to repel them?”

— Benjamin Franklin, 1785

On 13 August 1944, paratroopers and glidermen of the 101st Airborne Division anxiously awaited knowledge of their fate. They had just arrived at their marshaling area at Membury Airfield, England. They loaded the bellies and doorways of C-47s with parapacks of bandoleers, mortar shells, and machine-gun ammunition, with K rations and D rations, medical supplies, and 75-mm. pack howitzers. They lashed down jeeps, trailers, and fully assembled 105s in British Horsa and American CG4A gliders.¹ These initial preparations at the marshaling area ensured they were prepared to take off on minimum notice. Officers of the unit would later issue additional equipment to the soldiers as the hour of attack approached. The Normandy landings had given the soldiers their initial trial by fire. They were combat-tested veterans whose preparations had become a matter of routine. Indeed, they had accomplished much since conducting airborne basic training at Fort Benning, and the tactical capability of the unit had greatly improved. For now, in Membury, the paratroopers and glidermen had done all that they could, and now they waited. Four days later, the Allies canceled Operation TRANSFIGURE, the

¹Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, “Operation TRANSFIGURE Air Movement Table,” Record Group 331, *Employment of Airborne Forces in OVERLORD*, 373/2 Vol. I (Office of Secretary, General Staff Records, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 1943-45). For additional information on preparations for Operation TRANSFIGURE, see David Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich* (Random House LLC, 2011).

reason that the paratroopers and glidermen marshaled at Membury.² This is one example of the eighteen airborne operations that the Allies planned but did not conduct during World War II in the European Theater of Operations.³ They planned these airborne operations in detail and allocated scarce resources to them as well. Four years prior, the coalition did not have such a capability. The doctrine, planning, and ideology of airborne operations had evolved and gave the Allies a relatively new airborne capability.

Between 1940 and 1943, the United States Airborne effort grew at a startling pace. Following the apparent success of German airborne operations against Belgium in 1940, the United States War Department directed the Chief of Infantry to begin exploring options for delivering troops by air to the battlefield.⁴ Within three months, the Chief of Infantry formed an airborne test platoon that not only proved the feasibility of delivering troops by air to the battlefield, but also became the Army's first parachute battalion.⁵ The incipient airborne effort posed four immediate problems for the War Department: training, equipping, organizing, and employing airborne forces. The Parachute School at Fort Benning, Georgia, which trained every

²Lewis Hyde Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries. The War in the Air in the Pacific, Middle East and Europe, 3 October 1941 - 8 May 1945* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1976), 334.

³*Ibid.*, 343.

⁴John T. Ellis Jr., *The Airborne Command and Center*, Army Ground Forces Studies Series, Number 25 (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1946), 6. This Army Group Forces study gives a comprehensive account of German airborne operations prior to World War II. Additionally, Franz Kurowski, *Jump Into Hell: German Paratroopers in World War II* (Stackpole Books, 2009) gives a more detailed account of airborne operations from the German perspective.

⁵Ellis, 3.

man in every parachute unit, alleviated the War Department's training concerns.⁶ However, the War Department still could not adequately equip units with parachutes, communication equipment, or ammunition.⁷ The War Department initially organized parachute troops as separate General Headquarters battalions without provisions for a higher headquarters.⁸ In order to provide uniform training, equipment and organization, Army Ground Forces activated Airborne Command on 21 March 1942, under the command of Colonel William C. Lee.⁹ Later, Army

⁶Robert R. Palme, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1948), 258. The Parachute School served as a combined school, activation agency, and replacement center, without specific branch affiliation, and limited to instruction in a technique of transportation and in the technical problems created by drop landing. It trained every parachutist and replacement. Additionally, it certified the activation of units.

⁷James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue: US Army Airborne Operations in World War II* (Purdue University Press, 1999); Lt Col Wm. C. Lee to Maj Ridgely Gaither, personal communication, 14 May 1941.

⁸Ellis, 11. Initially, the Army's General Staff believed that parachute troops would seldom employ in units larger than a battalion. Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces, the Organization of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History), 94. The first American parachute unit specifically organized as such was authorized on 16 September 1940 for immediate activation at Fort Benning. It was designated the 501st Parachute Battalion and its Table of Organization called for 34 officers and 412 enlisted men, all to be volunteers. GHQ played no ascertainable part in this action. The activation and training of parachute units, as of other air-landing units, remained until the dissolution of GHQ a function of the General Staff and the Chief of Infantry. Additionally, the initial airborne force was hampered by a lack of transport aircraft for mobilization and training of forces.

⁹War Department, General Staff, *Air-borne Invasion of Crete*, Military Intelligence Division (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941). With its invasion of Crete in 1941, Germany provided the impetus for the War Department's creation of the Airborne Command. The German invasion was the most complex of its time and used paratroopers as well as glidermen. The invasion of Crete served as an illustration of the unlimited capabilities of a balanced airborne force, comprising all the elements of the standard infantry division, and limited only by the cargo-carrying capability of the available air transport. Furthermore, the operation inspired the United States Air Corps to experiment with gliders as a means of transportation for men and materiel. Gerhard L Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 223-230. The results of the German invasion of

Ground Forces activated airborne divisions, and placed them under the Airborne Command for training only. In short, the Airborne Command, with its newly assigned Parachute School, was primarily a training center that had limited control over the organization and equipping of airborne forces. Subsequently, the airborne divisions remained under army headquarters for administration and supply. Although the United States made many advances in its airborne effort, it still lagged behind Germany, which was at the cutting edge of airborne operations. The German invasion of Crete in 1941 showed the possibilities of airborne operations that combined paratroopers and glidermen. The United States quickly saw the synergy of combined airborne operations, and incorporated glider operations into the airborne effort.¹⁰ Although, the combined airborne force fared well in unopposed training exercises, it achieved mixed results against the enemy of the Louisiana and Carolina maneuvers.¹¹ However, with the addition of the glider, the

Crete were so devastating that Germany considered further airborne operations too costly to execute.

¹⁰Ellis, 6. In August 1941, a glider battalion, which was reinforced with a parachute company, conducted the first major airborne training exercise in the United States Army. The paratroopers served as the attack echelon, seizing and holding the airfield objective an hour before the air-landing element reached the target area. The operation was deemed a complete success and vividly emphasized the requirement for complete staff coordination between the Air Corps and airborne forces, air-ground communication, and further development of aircraft designed to transport ground troops and equipment.

¹¹Christopher R. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, DC: U. S. Army Center of Military History), 191. Results of the maneuvers indicated that parachute troops were most useful in small-scale sabotage activities and that drops against defended objectives should be made on a broad front at some distance from the intended targets in order to avoid the slaughter that befell the 502d when it dropped on Pope Field. Wartime practice cut directly across the maneuvers lessons. American airborne troops in Europe generally fought as divisions (a total of five were activated), performed key roles in the most crucial of ground operations, and preferred to drop as near their objectives as possible.

United States military held two powerful components of their future airborne force but still did not grasp the doctrine they would use to employ them.¹²

In fact, the effort produced very little doctrine between 1941 and 1942. The airborne force consisted of airlanding troops, parachute troops, and troop carrier aircraft. Field Manual (FM) 31-30, *Tactics and Technique of Air-borne Troops*, only governed use of airlanding and parachute troops.¹³ Furthermore, the field manual's main concern was clearly parachute troops. Broadly speaking, the manual envisaged the seizure of suitable landing areas by parachute troops, and then their reinforcement by troops arriving by glider or airplane. However, the manual also described other missions that would be suitable for airborne forces e.g., seizing and holding key terrain, establishing bridgeheads, and acting as a diversion. The common theme of all missions was the subsequent link up of stronger ground forces. Additionally, FM 31-30 detailed principles of employment that governed parachute troops. Among those principles were: the element of surprise, knowledge of terrain, and air superiority.¹⁴ These initial airborne missions and principles served as the basis for early airborne planning and the War Department embedded them in other

¹²US Assault Training Center, European Theater of Operations, The Assault Training Center, *Conference on Landing Assaults: 24 May - 23 June 1943, Volume 1, Part 1* (U.S. Assault Training Center, 1943), 33. A conference was held during the first half on 1943. The infantry still wrestled with the best way to employ airborne forces. The conference used lessons from Operation TORCH. The conclusion was to employ the airborne force en masse to decrease the need for accurate landings.

¹³Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 31-30, *Tactics and Technique of Air-Borne Troops* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942). The War Department published doctrine that governed troop carrier aircraft a year later in Field Manual 100-20. This field manual served as the Air Force's declaration of independence. As such, it gave little mention of troop carrier aircraft to be used in airborne operations.

¹⁴Ibid., 33. The principles of employment of parachute troops also held the theme of a timely linkup with supporting ground forces.

doctrinal publications of the time.¹⁵ In addition, while FM 31-30 codified limited doctrine for airlanding and parachute troops, it did not govern troop carrier aircraft in support of airborne operations. In late 1942, Airborne Command sought standardization of airborne operational procedure. The command therefore proposed that the War Department appoint a board of air and ground officers to recommend standard techniques in such matters as staff planning, troop-loading, resupply, mutual identification and communication, control, formations, and pilot-jumpmaster coordination. In turn, the board developed standard operating procedures for airborne-troop carrier operations.¹⁶ The initial airborne effort of World War II relied on the doctrine of 1942, which consisted of FM 31-30 combined with the board's standard operating procedures.

On 8 November 1942, elements of the 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment took part in the first major airborne assault carried out by the United States. This was Operation TORCH. The paratroopers of the 509th flew all the way from Britain, over Spain, intending to drop near the city of Oran and capture airfields at Tafraoui and La Senia, respectively fifteen miles and five miles south of Oran. Problems plagued the operation, as weather, navigational and communication problems caused widespread scattering and forced thirty of thirty-seven aircraft to land in the dry salt lake to the west of the objective.¹⁷ The airborne force lost the element of surprise and remained scattered. Only 300 of 556 paratroopers assembled on 15 November at Maison Blanche airfield, near Algiers, for the next operation. General Henry H. Arnold,

¹⁵Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-15, *Field Service Regulations Larger Units* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 22, 29.

¹⁶ Huston, *Out of the Blue*. 51.

¹⁷George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa - Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1957). 213.

Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, summed up the paratroop operation as having been "...carried out with all the high courage and confusion I had expected."¹⁸ The United State's nascent airborne effort continued to struggle the following year. "On 10 July 1943, the (Airborne) Command, as well as all airborne units, was electrified by the news that the 82nd Airborne Division had spearheaded the Allied invasion of Sicily." This was Operation HUSKY. The paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division intended to envelop the enemy defenses at Gela and Scoglitti. Strong winds of up to forty-five miles per hour blew the troop-carrying aircraft off course and caused the aircraft to scatter paratroopers widely over southeast Sicily between Gela and Syracuse. Adding complexity, friendly forces mistakenly shot down many follow-on aircraft. Nevertheless, the scattered paratroopers of the initial drop accomplished most of their assigned missions. According to James Gavin, then commander of 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Operation HUSKY proved that vertical envelopment at night was feasible and almost impossible to stop.¹⁹ Despite the small modicum of success that the paratroopers achieved in HUSKY, detailed after action reports revealed that the planning and execution of the mission violated many of the principles of employment that were generally recognized as essential to the success of airborne operations. As a result, the War Department constituted a board to recommend

¹⁸Stewart W. Bentley, Jr., *The Touch of Greatness: Colonel William C. Bentley Jr., USAAC/USAF; Aviation Pioneer* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010), 91. The author gives an account of the planning of Operation TORCH from the perspective of Colonel William C. Bentley Jr, the commander of the Paratroop Task Force.

¹⁹James M Gavin, *Airborne Warfare* (Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1980), 17. Gavin acknowledges the problems inherent to airborne operations. However, he believes that the military can solve many problems by the heart, individual skill, courage, and initiative of the American Paratrooper. Further, Gavin quotes the commander of the German invasion of Crete who the Allies took as a prisoner of war. In 1945, General Karl Student said: The Allied airborne operation in Sicily was decisive despite the widely scattered drops, which a military must expect in a night landing.

procedures that units would follow in the planning and execution of airborne operations. The War Department published these recommendations as War Department Training Circular (TC) 113, *Employment of Airborne and Troop Carrier Forces*.²⁰ In addition, because of Operation HUSKY, Combined Planners of the Combined Chiefs of Staff studied airborne policy through the early months of 1944 and made several recommendations to the Combined Chiefs.²¹ Training Circular 113 and the report of the combined staff added some clarity for future planners of World War II airborne operations. The airborne effort survived its trial by fire in Africa and Sicily. The eyes of the world were on the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions as they jumped into Normandy. This was Operation Neptune, the assault operation for OVERLORD. For the first time, the war effort committed both divisions in force to enable the early seizure of port and beach facilities and the rapid consolidation of a permanent beachhead. The 82nd Airborne Division's mission was to land astride the Merderet River and then seize, clear and secure the general area of Neuville au Plain-Ste. Mere Eglise-Chef du Pont- Etienneville-Amfreville. The 101st Airborne Division's mission

²⁰War Department, Training Circular No. 113, *Employment of Airborne and Troop Carrier Forces* (Washington, DC: United States War Department, October 9, 1943). American airborne units adhered to the general principles of this circular throughout the remainder of World War II. The circular defined troop carrier units as: "Army Air Force units which are specially organized, trained, and equipped to transport airborne troops and supplies into combat". In short, the Air Corps controlled the troop carrier units; the Army controlled the airborne forces. The circular also called for the employment of airborne troops in mass, but additionally stated that units should not use airborne troops if the mission could be performed by other troops. Finally, the circular stated that airborne forces "should not be employed unless they can be supported by other ground or naval forces within approximately 3 days, or unless they can be withdrawn after their mission has been accomplished."

²¹Combined Chiefs of Staff, *Report 3 February 1944*. The report noted that the Allies had not used parachute and glider teams as envisioned, but still saw potential in the concept. It also was critical of the time it took to plan airborne operations, suggesting that the Allies base airborne troops and troop carrier aircraft closer together. It recommended the possible use of pathfinder units to help mark drop zones. Finally, it suggested that the Allies should shift airborne forces from one theater to another as needed.

was to drop north of Carentan and then block the movement of German reserves while seizing the western ends of the causeways leading from the assault beaches. However, the troop carriers scattered paratroopers in wide areas and in most cases, far away from the target objectives. As a result, both divisions did not successfully accomplish over half of their specific airborne objectives within the planned time. Nevertheless, many of the most urgent and vital purposes of the operation were achieved. The airborne force's actions greatly assisted the amphibious landings. Enemy reinforcements did not reach the beachhead area. Additionally, the airborne force neutralized the enemy in the immediate area of the assault.²² Airborne planners learned the importance of joint planning and training between the troop carrier command and the airborne forces. Furthermore, planners learned that large-scale airborne operations required coordination with several agencies. For numerous reasons, the Allied airborne effort of World War II provided mixed results. Therefore, the Allies did not execute all of their planning efforts. Why did the Allies not use their airborne forces effectively during World War II?

In June 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, "issued outline proposals for a combined British and American Headquarters, Airborne Troops, for the control of airborne troops after the Normandy operations."²³ The coalition later renamed the headquarters to the First Allied Airborne Army. In

²²*Historical Study of Some World War II Airborne Operations: WSEG Staff Study No. 3* (Eglin AFB, FL: Weapons System Evaluation Group, 1951), 19.

²³T. B. H Otway, *Airborne Forces. The Second World War, 1939-1945, Army*, 2nd ed. (London: Imperial War Museum, 1990), 201. General Eisenhower stated his reasons in a message to General George C. Marshall, Chief of the General Staff, United States Army: "...experience has proved that in preparing to utilize large airborne forces there is at present no suitable agency available to the High Command to assume responsibility for joint planning between the troop carrier command and the airborne forces. This planning includes joint training, development of

conjunction with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, the First Allied Airborne Army's planning staff only dealt with outline plans. Detailed planning was the responsibility of the lower formations.²⁴ The fact that the U.S. Chief of Staff, General Marshall, and General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, wanted to see what a large-scale airborne attack could accomplish deep in enemy territory heightened General Eisenhower's desire for a suitable occasion to employ the Airborne Army.²⁵ The First Allied Airborne Army considered eighteen separate airborne plans. Five reached the stage of detailed planning. Three progressed almost to the point of launching. None matured. The plans embraced a variety of objectives: the city of Tournai, to block Germans retreating from the Channel coast; the vicinity of Liege, to get the First Army across the Meuse River; the Aachen-Maastricht gap, to get Allied troops through the West Wall.²⁶ The Allies did not execute these plans because of doctrinal deficiencies, planning inefficiencies, and competing ideologies in the Allied Force.

operational projects and logistical support until this function can be taken over by normal agencies. It includes also co-ordination with ground and naval forces.”

²⁴Ibid., 203. “The activities of the FAAA were controlled by a series of directives, issued by GEN Eisenhower, by which the airborne army's resources were placed at the disposal of a particular army group for specified periods. Thus, all its resources were allotted to 21st Army Group during the pursuit from Normandy to the River Rhine, and again for the crossing of the River Rhine. The intention behind this was to free SHAEF from tactical planning, the idea being that requirements for the employment of an airborne force should be initiated at the army group level and then planned direct with the FAAA. The original requirement was examined in outline, both from the Army and Air Force point of view, by the FAAA and if considered suitable by them was passed on to the [airborne] corps headquarters concerned for more detailed planning.”

²⁵Forrest C. Pogue, *The European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1954), 279.

²⁶Charles Brown MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2001). 119.

DOCTRINAL DEFICIENCIES

Military doctrine is military, and particularly tactical philosophy; doctrine creates certainty, which is the soul of every action.

—General A. A. Svechin

Undoubtedly, the deficiencies of the British and American airborne doctrine immediately confounded airborne planners. The doctrine was deficient because of three primary reasons. First, the American and British airborne forces developed different doctrinal concepts from their observations of Operation HUSKY. Second, the ill-defined airborne doctrine was open to interpretation. Finally, external doctrine was in direct competition with the internal doctrine of airborne operations.²⁷ Each stakeholder's differing opinion on doctrine may have led to the downfall of some airborne operations.

The American observations of Operation HUSKY led them to codify definitive principles for airborne employment and considerations for the selection of landing areas. Training Circular 113 served as the American codifying document for airborne doctrine. According to the training circular, one of the important principles for employment was that airborne troops should be “employed in mass. The bulk of the force should be landed rapidly in as small an area as practicable.”²⁸ One of the important considerations for the selection of landing areas was that the “objective should be sufficiently close to the landing area to insure surprise.”²⁹ The circular concludes its paratrooper mission section by stating that the mere presence of airborne forces in a theater of operations causes the enemy to disperse his forces over a wide area in order to protect

²⁷Richard Mead, *General 'Boy' the Life of Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Browning*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010).

²⁸Training Circular 113, 2.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

vital installations.³⁰ Furthermore, TC 113 was the first document to provide doctrinal guidance for employment of troop carrier units in support of airborne operations.³¹ The circular concludes its troop carrier section by stating that the highest headquarters in theater must divert troop carrier units from secondary missions in ample time to allow complete preparation to accomplish primary missions.³²

Conversely, the British observations of Operation HUSKY led them to adopt opposite principles for both airborne employment and considerations for the selection of landing areas. The British official report of inquiry blamed the failure of Operation HUSKY on “the use of small tactical (dropzones) DZs,” and “their (close) proximity to the enemy objectives.”³³ In other words, the American airborne doctrine recommended landing on small dropzones that were close to the enemy objective. However, the British airborne doctrine recommended landing on large dropzones that were farther from the enemy objective. The British analysis of HUSKY led to a marked “shift away from accepting risk to aircraft and men.”³⁴ As a further complication, the

³⁰Ibid., 4. According to the planning section of Training Circular 113, airborne units could be used for the following specific missions: seizing or holding important terrain; attacking the enemy rear; blocking or delaying enemy reserves; capturing enemy airfields; capturing or destroying vital enemy establishments; creating diversions; assisting the tactical air force in delaying a retreating enemy; reinforcing threatened or surrounded units; seizing islands; and creating confusion among hostile military or civilian personnel.

³¹Ibid., 4. Training Circular 113 states that troop carrier units could be used as follows: primarily to provide air transportation for airborne forces into combat; and to resupply such forces until they are withdrawn or can be supplied by other means; secondarily to conduct emergency resupply operations.

³²Ibid., 4-5. The friction between the primary and secondary missions of the troop carrier aircraft dominated airborne planning during the early part of August 1944.

³³John William Greenacre, *Churchill's Spearhead: The Development of Britain's Airborne Forces During the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2011).

³⁴Ibid.

codified British airborne doctrine was primarily concerned with organization, not employment of airborne forces.³⁵ Finally, unlike American doctrine, British airborne doctrine did not incorporate guidance for troop carrier units. The American and British airborne forces developed different doctrinal concepts from their observations of Operation HUSKY. These doctrinal differences caused confusion among the First Allied Airborne Army's planners.

From the start, doctrinal differences hampered Operation COMET, the precursor to Operation MARKET. Doctrinal differences came to the forefront of planning concerns as planners attempted to adjust the plan of Operation COMET. The airborne planners had to reconcile the different doctrinal concepts derived from Operation HUSKY, with the doctrine that governed the IX Troop Carrier Command.

As directed by the First Allied Airborne Army, 1st Airborne Corps was to "prepare detailed plans for an airborne operation along the River Rhine between Arnhem and Wesel" immediately.³⁶ The overall mission of COMET was to land "in such areas as will permit of your [1st Airborne Corp's] seizing intact and controlling all bridges and ferries over the River Rhine and its branch from Arnhem to Wesel, both inclusive."³⁷ Initially planned as a strictly British operation, planners incorporated the doctrinal concept that the British derived from HUSKY. They attempted to "shift away from accepting risk to aircraft and men,"³⁸ by establishing drop

³⁵*Airborne Forces*, 136-137.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 343.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Greenacre, *Churchill's Spearhead*.

zones that were farther away from the enemy objective.³⁹ As the Allies expanded Operation COMET into MARKET, they added the American airborne divisions, both of which vehemently disagreed with the proposed placement of their drop zones. The 82nd and 101st Airborne Division commanders decried the plan by stating that it essentially negated American doctrine.⁴⁰ This consternation was one of the many that would plague Operation MARKET. However, doctrinal differences were only the start of problems that would plague the airborne planners, they would also contend with differing interpretations of the doctrine at hand.

As a further complication, Allied airborne doctrine was vague enough to allow open interpretations to be made, sometimes to the detriment of airborne operations. The open interpretation of doctrine caused friction between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force and the First Allied Airborne Army, which led the army groups to reluctantly accept outline plans produced by the First Allied Airborne Army. The Allied doctrine stated that airborne forces were, in fact, “theater of operations forces. Plans for their combined employment must be prepared by the agency having authority to direct the necessary coordinated action of all land, sea, and air forces in the areas involved.”⁴¹ Therefore, the planning of airborne operations should have occurred at the supreme headquarters level, or at least maintained the appearance its authority. Instead, the supreme headquarters delegated much of the outline planning responsibility to the First Allied Airborne Army, which then relied on the supported army group for detailed planning. Airborne planning, during the month of August, devolved into a process

³⁹Roger Cirillo, “The MARKET Garden Campaign: Allied Operational Command in Northwest Europe, 1944” (Dissertation, Cranfield University, 2001), 348.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 392.

⁴¹Training Circular 113, 1.

whereby the airborne army produced operational outlines without significant input from the supreme headquarters or the supported army group. If the coalition had established the First Allied Airborne Army under the auspices of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force as the coordinating agency, which the current doctrine entailed, the army groups might have readily accepted the outline plans that the airborne army produced.

The primary objective of Operation LINNET II was to land forces in the area of Aachen-Maastricht in order to block the gap, thereby cutting off German forces.⁴² Brereton, acting on his own accord, ordered his staff to plan this operation in the event that the Allies canceled LINNET. The coalition did not plan LINNET in support the tactical plan of 21st Army Group. In fact, the Aachen-Maastricht gap was not in 21st Army Group's area of operations. It is important to remember that the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force charged the First Allied Airborne Army to develop outline plans for operations after receiving the airborne requirements from the supported Army group. Not only did 21st Army Group not require this operation, it did not know First Allied Airborne Army was planning it. It is hard to find a doctrinal underpinning for Brereton's decision to move forward with the planning of LINNET II. Training Circular 113 states that during the planning phase, "contacts by all commanders and staffs concerned with the operation should be intimate and continuous."⁴³ This was clearly not the case in the planning of LINNET II. As a further complication, Brereton intended to execute this operation within 36

⁴²*Airborne Forces*, 213. Operation LINNET II appears to be the contrivance of Brereton alone. Neither 21st Army Group nor SHAEF requested this operation. Furthermore, the objective of the operation was outside of 21st Army Group's area and was actually in 12th Army Group's area. To read more specifics on Operation LINNET II see Dr. Roger Cirillo's 2001 dissertation on the MARKET-Garden campaign.

⁴³Training Circular 113, 7.

hours on 5 September 1944. Indeed, the airborne headquarters planned LINNET II in haste and Lieutenant General Browning protested to Brereton that maps of the area could not be distributed in time for an adequate briefing.⁴⁴ Again, it is difficult to find doctrinal support for Brereton's decision to continue planning Operation LINNET II. Training Circular 113 states that the staff "planning and coordination [for airborne operations] are complicated and require considerable time."⁴⁵ Ignoring that doctrinal guidance, Brereton continued to rush the planning of an operation that the supported Army group did not require. While it is difficult to doctrinally support Brereton's decision, it is notable that the doctrine of the time allowed for an open interpretation that did not prohibit the planning of LINNET II. The 21st Army Group eventually canceled LINNET II because it was not necessary.

Additionally, the open interpretation of doctrine caused friction between the First Allied Airborne Army and the supported Army group, which led to confusion in the airborne effort. Key leaders applied open interpretations to the type of missions considered appropriate for airborne forces. The established airborne doctrine at the time outlined the tactical nature of the airborne missions, which the airborne force could accomplish. Unfortunately, the First Allied Airborne Army commander was often hesitant to plan tactical operations because he felt that airborne forces were strategic in nature. Consequently, while the Army groups required the tactical employment of airborne forces, they often surmised that the outline plans produced by the First Allied Airborne Army would not meet their tactical requirements. The planning conferences

⁴⁴Mead, 610. General Clough speaks specifically of Operation LINNET II's impact on the map-making section, which was now charged with providing approximately 1,750,000 maps within thirty-six hours to the entire Airborne Army which was dispersed over several dozen airfields.

⁴⁵Training Circular 113, 5.

conducted during the month of August should have served as coordination meetings, that is to say, the smooth and efficient handoff of the First Allied Airborne Army outline plan to the respective Army group. Regrettably, these conferences sometimes served as a forum for the First Allied Airborne Army commander to change the tactical requirement before him.⁴⁶

The primary objective of Operation BOXER was to capture the city of Boulogne. First Allied Airborne Army completed the outline plan on 19 August 1944.⁴⁷ At the planning conference held on 25 August 1944, Brereton convinced the 21st Army Group's chief of staff, Major-General Sir Francis Wilfred de Guingand, that the "Boulogne area...would not answer your (21st Army Group's) requirements."⁴⁸ The First Allied Airborne Army commander believed that Boulogne operation was not within the capabilities of the First Allied Airborne Army. Brereton went on to convince de Guingand that the city of Doullens or Lille should be the priority target of the 21st Army group. Having shifted the ground plan to Doullens, Brereton effectively canceled BOXER. However, according to his published diaries, Brereton says he refused this mission because it was of a tactical nature and the linkup with ground forces would have occurred within 48 hours.⁴⁹ Notably, the Boulogne operation was doctrinally acceptable as TC 113 established the operation's tactical elements. Additionally, according to the training circular, the airborne force should have linked up with a ground force within 3 days. Brereton stated the linkup would have occurred within 48 hours, which was also doctrinally acceptable. The planning conference for BOXER is a prime example of a conference that served as a forum for the First

⁴⁶Cirillo, 205.

⁴⁷Brereton, 334.

⁴⁸Cirillo, 343.

⁴⁹Brereton, 336.

Allied Airborne Army commander to change the tactical requirement before him, which effectively canceled Operation BOXER.

Furthermore, the open interpretation of doctrine caused friction between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force and the army groups, which forced the Allies to bypass valid airborne objectives. Training Circular 113 described the types of airborne objectives that the military could employ the airborne force against. Lamentably, the First Allied Airborne Army commander could refuse requested operations against doctrinally valid airborne objectives if he felt they were unsuitable for the airborne force. The army group that had priority for airborne planning occasionally had to lobby the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force for approval of their requested operations. Unbeknownst to the supported army group, the First Allied Airborne Army did not even consider some airborne operations that it should have at least planned in outline form. Unless the army group could persuade the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force otherwise, the Allies would have to bypass these airborne operational objectives or engaged them with other forces.

Operation INFATUATE provides another example of Lieutenant General Brereton's open interpretation of doctrine that led to confusion in the Allied airborne planning effort. The primary objective of Operation INFATUATE was to land airborne forces on Walcheren Island to assist in opening the port of Antwerp by cutting off and hastening the German retreat across the Scheldt estuary. Unlike LINNET II, 21st Army Group actually requested this operation. However, according to Brereton, he refused the operation partly because it was an improper employment of airborne forces.⁵⁰ Operation INFATUATE would have been doctrinally

⁵⁰Ibid., 341.

appropriate for airborne forces of the time. In fact, TC 113 lists operations conducted against islands as one of the primary missions of airborne forces.⁵¹ The original operation was requested as early as 11 September 1944. Nevertheless, the First Allied Airborne Army left the outline plan for Operation INFATUATE untouched. On 21 September 1944, 21st Army Group, which had priority for airborne planning, had to lobby the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force for approval of Operation INFATUATE. Ultimately, due to Brereton's refusal, 21st Army Group had to develop a contingency plan that used Canadian Forces for the capture of Walcheren Island.⁵²

To reiterate, Allied airborne doctrine was vague enough to allow the coalition to make open interpretations, sometimes to the detriment of operations. Doctrinally, outline planning should have occurred at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force level. Instead, the First Allied Airborne Army often developed outline plans that did not carry the full weight of the supreme headquarters. Therefore, the army groups reluctantly accepted these plans. Doctrinally, many missions of the airborne force were tactically oriented. However, the tactical nature of outline plans that the airborne army developed were sometimes at odds with its commander's strategic thinking. Therefore, planning conferences often produced confusion instead of clarity. Doctrinally, certain types of objectives were well within the capabilities of the airborne force. Nevertheless, the airborne army could refuse these types of objectives. Therefore, the supported army groups had to develop contingency plans for the objectives that airborne forces refused. The

⁵¹Training Circular 113, 4.

⁵²Richard Brooks and Graham Turner, *Walcheren 1944: Storming Hitler's Island Fortress* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011); Bernard Law Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 198. Montgomery gives a detailed account of the resources required to capture Walcheren.

open interpretation of doctrine hampered Operations BOXER, LINNET II, and INFATUATE. The doctrinal interpretations of the First Allied Airborne Army Commander led to the cancellation of these operations. However, another problem would cause some consternation as well, the external doctrine that affected airborne operations.

Due to the nature of operations, the airborne force was reliant upon troop carriers for air movement and the Allied Expeditionary Air Force for air support. Therefore, the First Allied Airborne Army planners had to consider not only the different and vague doctrine that governed airborne operations, but also the external doctrine that could affect airborne operations. The Allies had already codified some troop carrier doctrine in TC 113. According to the training circular, since “air movement is essentially an air operation; the delivery of airborne troops to their destination is a responsibility of the troop carrier commander.”⁵³ Additionally, the troop carrier commander was responsible for prescribing the use and allocation of troop carrier units in a manner as favorable to the requirements of the airborne commander as technical and tactical conditions permit.⁵⁴ While the doctrine clearly stated that the troop carrier commander would use his units in a manner favorable to the airborne commander, the additional stipulation “as technical and tactical conditions permit” caused some issues. That stipulation allowed the troop carrier commander wide latitude in determining how he would support the airborne force commander. For example, if the airborne force requirement was one lift to be employed en masse, as was doctrinally appropriate, the troop carrier commander could effectively veto the requirement and

⁵³Training Circular 113, 7.

⁵⁴Ibid., 7.

instead provide multiple lifts separated by hours. Therefore, where the airborne force commander hoped to achieve mass, the troop carriers delivered the airborne force by piecemeal.

The external doctrine of Troop Carrier Command affected the planning for COMET. As COMET transformed into MARKET, there were insufficient aircraft to bring the whole force in on a single lift.⁵⁵ The IX Troop Carrier Commander felt that the technical and tactical conditions doctrinally would not permit multiple lifts on the first day. Instead, he used wide latitude in determining how he would support the airborne force commander. Citing the reasons of crew fatigue and aircraft maintenance, the IX Troop Carrier Commander would only allow one lift per day. Where the airborne force commander hoped to achieve mass, he was to be delivered piecemeal.

The doctrine for air support further compounded the matter. Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, the commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force initially framed the doctrine for air support that developed over time. “As Mallory defined airborne operations, he saw that ‘from take-off to landing, an airborne operation being a purely air operation-must be the responsibility of the Air C. -in- C., who must retain the power of veto.’”⁵⁶ General Eisenhower supported this doctrine that Mallory framed. In an already-complicated planning process, the air force commander was yet another hurdle in the path of a First Allied Airborne Army outline plan. In other words, Mallory held considerable influence on the planning process. He could possibly impede or change an outline plan through the threat of veto. The inclinations of both the IX Troop

⁵⁵Mead.

⁵⁶Cirillo, 182.

Carrier Commander and the Allied Expeditionary Air Force commander forced airborne planners to alter their plans.

The deficiencies of the British and American airborne doctrine confounded airborne planners. The doctrine was deficient because of three primary reasons: the different doctrinal concepts derived from Operation HUSKY, the open interpretation of ill-defined doctrine, and the competition between internal airborne doctrine and external support doctrine. Each stakeholder's differing opinion on doctrine led to the downfall of at least four airborne operations.

PLANNING INEFFICIENCIES

In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

Certainly, the inefficiencies of the planning process did not assist the planners or the overall Allied airborne effort. Planning was inefficient because of three primary reasons. First, the Allies failed to synchronize their planning efforts in time, space, and purpose between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, First Allied Airborne Army, and army groups. Second, the Allies convoluted their planning process. Finally, the staff of the First Allied Airborne Army lacked unity of effort. Allied planning inefficiency caused the Allies to cancel some airborne operations.

The Allies failed to synchronize their planning efforts in time, space, and purpose between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, First Allied Airborne Army, and army groups. The American breakthrough at St.Lo transformed a stable situation into an

extremely fluid one.⁵⁷ Synchronization was important. Airborne planners at all levels had to anticipate when, where, and for what purpose they would need airborne operations to support the advance. Furthermore, planners had to synchronize their efforts to deliver airborne forces at the right time and place with the right equipment to accomplish their objectives.

The inability to synchronize operations in time, one of the most important factors for planners, plagued the airborne effort. It was imperative that planners anticipate friendly maneuver and enemy reaction. Allied Armies could travel at least one hundred miles in a week. An airborne operation took approximately four to seven days to plan in detail from the initial concept.⁵⁸ In other words, to ensure a timely linkup, planners had to synchronize operations that would drop an airborne force approximately forty-three miles in front of friendly maneuver forces.⁵⁹ However, regardless of the planners' attempts at synchronization, the commander of the supported army group ultimately decided when to launch an airborne operation.

Operation TRANSFIGURE provides an example of the Allies' inability to synchronize operations in time. The objective of this operation, in support of 12th Army Group, was to place the necessary force in the area east of Chartres to prevent the enemy from escaping through the

⁵⁷John C Warren, "Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean 1942-1945, *Military Affairs*, (1955): 85.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 85; *Airborne Forces* (London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1990). 206-213; Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Entries from August 16, 1944 Thru September 25, 1944," Floyd L. Parks, *Military Associate Papers, 1913-65* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 1943-45). All of these sources provide enlightenment on the time it took to plan an airborne operation. Brigadier General Park's diary is extremely useful in detailing the changing situation as viewed from the First Allied Airborne Army.

⁵⁹Training Circular 113, 2. The doctrine of the time required linkup within 3 days. Airborne forces could expect a maneuver force to travel 43 miles in 3 days, based on a friendly maneuver estimate of 100 miles per week.

Paris-Orleans gap.⁶⁰ Although, the airborne force assembled at its marshaling areas and stood by to execute the operation, 12th Army Group initially postponed and later canceled the operation altogether.⁶¹ The Allied postponement of the operation allowed elements of the German 48th and 338th Divisions to fall back to the Seine and join other newly arriving units that gathered at Melun, Fontainebleau, and Montereau.⁶² The Allies cited the swift advance of Allied forces as the reason for TRANSFIGURE's cancellation. However, the airborne operational objective was to prevent the enemy's escape. Operation TRANSFIGURE might have held the enemy in place for Allied destruction. Without doubt, the amount of time required to prepare an airborne operation combined with the speed of the maneuver force had a direct impact on synchronizing operations in time.⁶³ However, planners had to consider additional factors when deciding where to drop an airborne force.

⁶⁰Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Outline Plan for Operation 'TRANSFIGURE,'" *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). Headquarters, British Airborne troops initially planned Operation TRANSFIGURE in July 1944. As First Allied Airborne Army activated, it took over the outline plan. James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue: US Army Airborne Operations in World War II* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999), 194.

⁶¹Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Bradley to 21st AG and SHAEF Fwd," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45). Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Eisenhower to Marshall Tedder," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45).

⁶²Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History), 583.

⁶³Training Circular 113, 3. The Training Circular lists a number of considerations for the selection of landing areas. Among them are: the element of surprise, ability to bypass strong points, and terrain favorable for defense against armored units.

The Allies failed to synchronize their operations in space. The previous airborne operations of World War II suffered from a widespread scattering of the airborne force, often far away from its objective. This scattering had a direct impact on the unit's ability to reorganize into combat teams and assault objectives.⁶⁴ Therefore, planners had to consider additional factors in order to synchronize airborne operations that delivered the airborne force at the correct location. The ability of the troop carriers and glidermen as well as the proposed drop zone terrain, and navigational aids all played a role in the selection of suitable drop zones. Another complication to synchronizing operations in space was the lack of synchronization between the individual army groups. Occasionally, through either a lack of awareness, or lack of care, an adjacent army group overtook proposed dropzones, which were outside his area of operations.

Operation LINNET provides an example of the Allies failure to synchronize their operations in space. In support of 21st Army Group, the objectives of Operation LINNET were to: seize a firm base in the vicinity of Tournai, secure and hold a bridgehead over the River Escaut at Tournai and control the principal roads leading north-east from the front through Tournai-Lille-Courtrai, thereby cutting off the German withdrawal. The Allies did not synchronize this operation in space primarily due to the actions of 12th Army Group. The Allies canceled Operation LINNET on 2 September after elements of 12th Army Group traveled six miles into 21st Army Group's area of operations to take the city of Tournai.⁶⁵ Planners not only struggled to

⁶⁴*Historical Study of Some World War II Airborne Operations*, 10. This study lists several factors that produced large difficulties for the airborne force and resulted in scattering. Among these factors were: isolation of the battle area, navigational aids, drop geometry, and terrain.

⁶⁵Floyd L. Parks, Military Associate: Papers, "Entries From August 16, 1944 Thru September 25, 1944." Entry for September 2nd, 1944; Omar N. Bradley *A Soldier's Story*. New York, NY: Henry Holt And Company, 1951, 403; Montgomery, 159; Brereton, 336. Brereton's

synchronize with where they would drop an airborne force, they also wrestled with the purpose of the drop.

Allied planners had difficulties synchronizing the purpose of airborne operations. The accumulated doctrine listed suitable objectives for airborne forces.⁶⁶ As a result, when planning contingency operations, planners had to forecast what objectives along the maneuver force's axis were suitable for airborne forces. Further, when planning requested operations, planners had to consider whether the army group's requested objectives were suitable for the airborne force. Occasionally, airborne planners managed to synchronize both doctrinal and requested objectives. In fact, some operations progressed to the point of marshaling troops at departure airfields only to have the supported army group commander cancel the airborne operation. Again, the airborne force waited for airborne operations that they would not execute.

Operations MILAN II and CHOKER II provide examples of the Allies' inability to synchronize the purpose of airborne operations. The objectives of these operations were to assist the Central Group of Armies over the Rhine River by seizing bridgeheads on the east side of the river.⁶⁷ It is important to note that these were two of the three planned airborne operations to assist the Allies over the Rhine. The third was Operation VARSITY, which the Allies executed on 24 March 1945, to assist 21st Army Group. The Allies began initial planning for all three

diaries read that 21st Army Group canceled Operation LINNET on August 31. This is unlikely because Allied forces had not yet taken Tournai.

⁶⁶Training Circular 113, 4; FM 31-30, 32.

⁶⁷Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Outline Plan for Operation 'MILAN TWO,'" *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45; Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Revised Outline Plan for Airborne Operation 'CHOKER TWO,'" *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45).

operations when, on 5 September 1944, the 12th Army Group Commander requested “an airborne assault to help him hurdle the river.”⁶⁸ Airborne planners completed the outline plans for Operations MILAN II and CHOKER II during the first half of October 1944. These operations were synchronized relatively early in time. In fact, the Allies initially planned to execute both operations by the middle of November 1944. Operation MARKET taught the Allies valuable lessons on the importance of synchronizing airborne operations in space. As a result, the Allies appear to have synchronized both Operations MILAN II and CHOKER II in time and space.⁶⁹ However, they did not synchronize the purpose of these operations. By getting a foothold across the river between Worms and Mainz on the night of 22 March, a week before the new target date for CHOKER II, General Patton’s 3rd Army rendered that airborne operation unnecessary, even impracticable, because at that moment the troop carriers were marshalling for Operation VARSITY.⁷⁰ Again the purpose of Operations MILAN II, CHOKER II, and VARSITY was to assist the Allies over the Rhine River by seizing bridgeheads on the east side of the river. As the Allies prepared to mount and execute CHOKER II, 12th Army group decided to continue their advance to “see how it goes.”⁷¹ The Allies canceled CHOKER II on 24 March 1945. While the

⁶⁸John C. Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, Research Studies Institute, 1956), 156; *A Soldier's Story*, 524. Bradley’s request led to the initial plan for VARSITY. Once Eisenhower gave priority to the northern thrust, Montgomery inherited VARSITY and the Allies developed subsequent plans to assist Bradley across the Rhine.

⁶⁹The Allies postponed the execution of both operations, eventually scrapping MILAN II, prioritizing CHOKER II, and further postponing it to March 1945.

⁷⁰Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 157.

⁷¹Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, “Msg From Brereton to 6 AG,” *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45); Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*. New York, NY: Henry Holt And Company, 1951, 521.

initiative of 12th Army Group is commendable, the Allies could have reallocated resources to Operation VARSITY.⁷² Instead these scarce resources remained allocated to Operation CHOKER II, an operation the Allies would not execute. While allied planners failed to synchronize operations in time, space, and purpose, additionally they struggled against the planning process itself.

The First Allied Airborne Army convoluted its planning process. Operational planning in theory greatly differed from reality. In theory, airborne planners followed a detailed schedule of planning for airborne operations.⁷³ The process included: the initial conference with the army group to discuss the outline plan; issue of a planning study; initial planning conference between the First Allied Airborne Army, airborne commander, and air commander; parallel studies by the airborne and troop carrier commanders; conference between the airborne and troop carrier commander; and parallel plans and order production by the airborne and troop carrier commanders.⁷⁴ That was the process in theory.

In reality, the process was much more frustrating. Often, the initial requirements that drove operational planning did not originate from the supported army group. In turn, this led to lower echelons planning in detail for airborne operations that had little chance of execution. Furthermore, although the Allies could cancel an operation during any point of the planning process, the Allies did not effectively communicate cancellations. This added confusion to the

⁷²Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 158. The Allies would have had an adequate number of glider pilots to support Operation VARSITY had they reallocated the 926 gliders held for CHOKER II. Instead, they had to use converted power pilots as glider pilots for Operation VARSITY.

⁷³See Figure 1.

⁷⁴*Airborne Forces*. Appendix F.

airborne effort as Army group commanders and paratroopers awaited operations that the coalition would not execute. Finally, the planning process drained time and resources, which were scarce commodities on the fluid battlefield of northern France. In order to save time, units marshaled troops, issued equipment, loaded aircraft, and awaited their final briefing while the airborne and troop carrier commanders finalized their plans.⁷⁵ While this measure saved time, it drained resources such as the trucks, aircraft, and map production, which supported the operation.⁷⁶

Operation BOXER provides an example of the frustrated Allied planning process for airborne operations. It is important to note that, during early August 1944, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force directed the First Allied Airborne Army to prepare outline plans for airborne operations requested by 21st Army Group. It was General Eisenhower's intent that the requirements of 21st Army Group would drive airborne operational planning. The objectives of Operation BOXER in support of 21st Army Group were to: capture Boulogne; operate in a south or south-easterly direction against the right flank and rear of enemy; attack the area from which the Germans launched flying bombs against England; and draw off enemy forces from the main front by creating a diversion in the Boulogne area.⁷⁷ Planning for Operation BOXER posed a major problem for the Allied force. The 21st Army Group did not initially request this operation. In fact, the deputy commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Sir Arthur Tedder requested that the First Allied Airborne Army plan

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶A.B. Clough, *Maps and Survey*. London: The War Office, 1952, 610-611. General Clough gives an account of the effect that frequent changes in the airborne plan had on the map-making sections.

⁷⁷Brereton, 334; *Airborne Forces*, 212.

Operation BOXER in outline form.⁷⁸ The Allies later canceled Operation BOXER at the August 25 planning conference after Lieutenant General Brereton and Major-General de Guingand agreed that the operation would take place off the main line of advance of 21st Army Group. The Allies did not plan Operation BOXER in accordance with 21st Army Group's operational requirements. Furthermore, the paratroopers, glidermen, aircraft, and other supporting equipment, which were already marshaled for Operation TRANSFIGURE, remained at the marshaling area to support Operation BOXER, an operation that the Allies would not execute. Although the convoluted planning process caused the planners some trouble, their troubles would continue because they lacked unity of effort.

Allied airborne planning lacked unity of effort, which made the planning effort inefficient. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force developed the manning plan for the First Allied Airborne Army's headquarters. The initial manning plan caused friction between the airborne leaders of the United States and Great Britain. Consequently, the First Allied Airborne Army had difficulty operating as a combined and joint staff. While, members of the combined staff maintained allegiances to their respective nations, members of the joint staff maintained allegiances to their respective service components. These varied allegiances caused disunity in the overall airborne effort and inefficiency in airborne planning.

⁷⁸The Allies originally called Operation BOXER the Tedder Plan. Clough, *Maps and Survey*. 610; Pressure from Washington, DC seems to have caused the impetus for this planning. Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From AGWAR Arnold to SCAEF Eisenhower," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater*, (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45); This pressure caused General Eisenhower to ask Tedder to present his plan to Brereton. Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Eisenhower to Marshall Tedder," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater*, (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff: Records, 1943-45).

The initial Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force staffing plan caused friction between the airborne leaders of the United States and Great Britain. General Eisenhower proposed that an American airman command the combined airborne force, with a British general as his deputy commander.⁷⁹ Eisenhower's decision pleased few. The British were particularly unhappy and felt strongly that the commander of the airborne army should be British. Specifically, the British wanted Lieutenant General Browning to command the Allied airborne force. Undaunted, General Eisenhower selected Lieutenant General Brereton over the objections of the British. The British were not the only nationality to take umbrage at Eisenhower's decision. Bradley, Ridgway and other American senior airborne officers considered Eisenhower's appointment of an airman to command the airborne infantry ill advised.⁸⁰ This initial friction created fault lines between the First Allied Airborne Army combined and joint staff. Members of the combined staff maintained allegiances to their respective nations and members of the joint staff maintained allegiances to their respective service components.

The members of the First Allied Airborne Army's combined staff maintained allegiances to their respective nations. Lieutenant General Browning, the Deputy Commander of the First Allied Airborne Army, maintained his personal links to 21st Army Group and the British Second Army. In fact, Montgomery used this personal channel to convey proposals for airborne operations to Browning.⁸¹ Likewise, General Bradley used his personal channel with General

⁷⁹Clay Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II* (Garden City, NY: Dial Press, 1985), 298. The Allies later named the combined airborne force the First Allied Airborne Army.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 299. Leigh-Mallory also objected to the removal of the IX Troop Carrier Command.

⁸¹Mead, 88.

Ridgway to convey additional proposals to the First Allied Airborne Army. As a further complication, American officers dominated the First Allied Airborne Army staff. In theory, the Allies would truly combine the First Allied Airborne Army staff, with American officers filling half of its key billets and British officers filling the other half. In reality, American officers with British officers as their deputies led the majority of the staff sections.⁸² Tellingly, the leadership of the First Allied Airborne Army frequently visited the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force and 12th Army Group. However, they only visited 21st Army group once. In short, the First Allied Airborne Army staff found itself supporting two opposing cliques. These opposing British and American allegiances segmented the First Allied Airborne Army staff and confused its efforts.

The members of the First Allied Airborne Army's joint staff maintained allegiances to their respective service components. Although Lieutenant General Brereton conceded to use the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force's manning plan to save time, he made at least one key and revealing decision concerning the formation of the staff. Lieutenant General Brereton selected a fellow airman, Brigadier General Ralph Stearley, to be the First Allied Airborne Army's operations officer. In essence, the man that First Allied Airborne Army charged to execute airborne operations had no airborne experience. Brereton actually viewed the air plan as the most important part of the airborne operation. The tactical ground plan was of secondary importance.⁸³ The First Allied Airborne Army staff officer with the most airborne experience was Brigadier General Stuart Cutler, the former chief of 12th Army Group's airborne section.

⁸²*Airborne Forces*, 204.

⁸³Cirillo, 195.

Lieutenant General Brereton selected Cutler as the chief of plans for the First Allied Airborne Army. Once again, the First Allied Airborne Army staff found itself supporting two opposing cliques. These opposing air-centric and ground-centric allegiances further segmented the First Allied Airborne Army staff and continued to confuse its efforts.

The inefficiencies of the planning process did not assist the planners or the overall Allied airborne effort. Allied planning was inefficient because of three primary reasons. First, the Allies failed to synchronize their planning efforts in time, space, and purpose between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, First Allied Airborne Army, and Army groups. Second, the Allies convoluted their planning process. Finally, the staff of the First Allied Airborne Army lacked unity of effort. Planning inefficiency caused the Allies to cancel some airborne operations.

COMPETING IDEOLOGIES

The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions.

—Leonardo da Vinci

The competing ideologies about the use of the airborne force and its resources hampered the overall Allied airborne effort. Three ideological competitions are evident. First, there was an ideological competition between the War Department and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. Second, there was an ideological competition between the First Allied Airborne Army and the Army groups. Finally, there was an ideological competition between the British and American Allies themselves. The competing ideologies of the Allies caused the cancelation of some airborne operations.

The ideological competition between the senior leaders of the War Department and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force confused the airborne effort. Since its inception, the airborne force had two ardent supporters in Generals George C. Marshall and Henry H. Arnold, respectively the Army Chief of Staff and the Commanding General, Army Air Forces. Early airborne thought percolated through Washington and led to increased support by

both Marshall and Arnold.⁸⁴ Both men urged Eisenhower to seek bold employment of the airborne force in Operation OVERLORD.⁸⁵ In fact, Arnold's staff saw the strategic possibilities of air envelopment and proposed a five to six division operation near Paris as part of the operation.⁸⁶ Although Eisenhower scaled back their expectations for OVERLORD, Marshall and Arnold never abandoned the idea of massive and decisive airborne operations, against strategic objectives, deep into enemy territory. Their idea of massive, decisive, and strategic envelopment was in direct competition with the Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force.

Initially, General Eisenhower held a very different idea for the employment of the airborne force. In a 1943 letter to General Marshall, Eisenhower stated flatly that he did not "believe in the airborne division."⁸⁷ Eisenhower felt that command and control issues, lack of transport, and technical difficulties would preclude the employment of an entire airborne division.⁸⁸ Therefore, in 1943 he concluded that the Allies could best use airborne forces in small tactical groups instead of large strategic divisions. However, by 1944, Eisenhower apparently

⁸⁴Cirillo, 175.

⁸⁵Blair, 298. "Letter From Marshall to Eisenhower," *Proposed airborne invasion of France* (OPD 381 ETO, Case 217) (Washington, DC: National Archives Building).

⁸⁶Henry Harley Arnold, *Global Mission* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books, 1989), 520-522; *George C. Marshall Interviews and Reminiscences for Forrest C. Pogue* (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Research Foundation, 1991), 465-466; Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 288; Cirillo, 175.

⁸⁷Letter from Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 20, September 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower the War Years Volume III* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library).

⁸⁸Guy LoFaro, *Sword of St. Michael: The 82nd Airborne Division in World War II*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2008), 180.

changed his ideas, bringing them more in line with those of Washington.⁸⁹ According to Russell E Weigley, the eighteen aborted airborne operations were planned due to Marshall's and Arnold's prodding.⁹⁰

A series of communications sent during the middle of August 1944 shows evidence of the ideological competition between the senior leaders of the War Department and Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. On 14 August 1944, Arnold sent a message to Eisenhower that asked for the broad outline for the employment of Brereton's command.⁹¹ Arnold's message caused the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force to jump into action the next day.⁹² On 16 August 1944, Eisenhower sent a response to the War Department that gave the broad operational plan for Brereton's airborne army.⁹³ Evidently, Eisenhower's broad operational ideas were not in line with the War Department's strategic ideas for the

⁸⁹Cirillo, 183. Eisenhower's establishment of the combined airborne force seems to indicate he changed his ideas about the employment of the airborne. However, by establishing the combined airborne force, Eisenhower ensured he maintained control over all airborne forces, troop carrier commands, and eventually the air transport group of the RAF.

⁹⁰Weigley, 289.

⁹¹Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From AGWAR Arnold to SCAEF Eisenhower," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). Arnold's message ends with the statement that troop carriers were not comparing at all favorably with combat planes in missions (other than for supply and training). Arnold may have been asking for a strategic plan that used airborne forces.

⁹²Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From G3 Bull to Chief of Staff Smith," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater*, (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). This message detailed the previous message from Arnold, attached the planned operations for airborne troops, and recommended that Smith approve it as a response to Arnold's inquiry.

⁹³Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From SHAEF Forward Eisenhower to AGWAR," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45).

employment of the airborne force. Fortunately, on the same day that he sent his operational plan to the War Department, Eisenhower received a message from Air Chief Marshal Tedder that promised the real strategic use of the airborne force.⁹⁴ In turn, Eisenhower told Tedder to present his complete idea to Brereton and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces Chief of Staff in order that the idea be planned to fruition.⁹⁵ This was Operation BOXER, an airborne operation that the Allies would not execute. In essence, General Arnold asked for a strategic plan for the use of Brereton's army. Instead, he received an operational plan, which he might have deemed unacceptable. Since Operation BOXER promised the strategic use of the airborne army, Eisenhower placed priority on its planning. While the competing ideologies of the War Department and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force confused the airborne effort, the competing ideologies of the First Allied Airborne Army and the Army groups also stymied the Allies.

The ideological competition between the First Allied Airborne Army and the army groups was detrimental to airborne operations.⁹⁶ In Lieutenant General Brereton's mind the

⁹⁴Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Air Chief Marshal Tedder to Gen. Eisenhower," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). Tedder's plan later became Operation BOXER.

⁹⁵Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Eisenhower to Marshall Tedder," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45).

⁹⁶*Airborne Forces* (London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1990), 203. From the outset, the First Allied Airborne Army held a difficult charge. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force charged it to prepare and examine outline plans in conjunction with the higher headquarters and subsequently prepare detailed plans in conjunction with the ground and air force commanders. Ideally, the First Allied Airborne Army and its higher headquarters had to approve the initial concept from the army group and then maintain the army group's support as it allocated resources for the planned airborne operation. Omar N. Bradley. A

primary mission for his army and its resources was to provide the transport of the airborne force to a strategic objective in support of the army group's maneuver plan.⁹⁷ In other words, the coalition should use its airborne force and the resources thereof in support of airborne operations that assisted the army group against a strategic objective, not in support of resupply operations for the army groups themselves.⁹⁸ While Brereton realized that the secondary mission of his airborne force, particularly the troop carriers, was to provide air resupply to the army groups, he viewed resupply operations as a waste of the strategic assets he controlled. His ideas about the use of the airborne force and its resources were in direct competition with the ideas of the army groups.

The individual army groups felt that the resources of the airborne army would be of greater utility to the Allied effort if used to resupply the maneuver forces. The Allied breakthrough at St. Lo transformed a stable situation into an extremely fluid one. Nearing the end of their operational reach, Allied army groups lacked the vital resupply necessary to continue the pursuit and maintain the initiative. For that reason, the army groups took little interest in executing airborne operations and instead chose to lobby for reallocation of troop carriers to

Soldier's Story. New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1951, 402. Omar Bradley expressed a negative view of the FAAA and its commander, stating that they "showed an astonishing faculty for devising missions that were never needed." As an army group commander, Bradley knew he held control over the airborne operations that the Allies would or would not conduct in his area of operations. Because of this codependence, ideological competition between the FAAA and the army groups was counterproductive

⁹⁷Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Letter From Lt. Gen. Brereton to Gen. Eisenhower," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). Brereton's letter goes on to presuppose no demand upon the troop carriers for resupply other than for the airborne force.

⁹⁸Notably, the doctrine of the time, namely Training Circular 113, supported LTG Brereton's view on the primacy of airborne operations versus resupply operations.

resupply of the maneuver force. The army groups felt that Allied planning, mounting, and execution of airborne operations sapped the resources they needed to continue their drive to Berlin.

An examination of the events of August and September 1944 shows evidence of the ideological competition between the First Allied Airborne Army and the army groups. On 14 August 1944, as paratroopers and glidermen awaited the fate of Operation TRANSFIGURE, 12th Army Group continued its dash to the Seine.⁹⁹ On that same day, while the 12th and 21st Army Group Commanders requested an increase of air resupply from the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, the Supreme Commander issued instructions that the Allies implement TRANSFIGURE.¹⁰⁰ On 15 August, the army group commanders got their wish as Eisenhower granted the increased air resupply request.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, on 16 August 1944, the 12th Army Group commander postponed TRANSFIGURE, an operation that the Allies would never

⁹⁹Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*. New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1951, 376. TRANSFIGURE is discussed in the Planning Inefficiencies section of this monograph.

¹⁰⁰Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From EXFOR Main to SHAEF, for Info 12th Army Gp, GS COM Zone, AEAFF, CG Allied Airborne Forces," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library: Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45); Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From EXFOR Main to SEARAIL (D.Q.M.O) MOV SHAEF (PLANS) AEAFF, HQ COMBINED AIRBORNE TPS, for Info 12th Army Gp," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45). As the War Department applied pressure on Eisenhower about the strategic employment of the airborne force, the army groups applied pressure on Eisenhower about the employment of the airborne force's resources.

¹⁰¹Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Msg From Eisenhower to EXFOR Main, for Info CG Allied Airborne Forces, 12th Army Gp, GS COM Zone," *Airborne Operations in World War II – European Theater* (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Office of Secretary General Staff Records, 1943-45); Several pieces of correspondence between the SHAEF G-3, SHAEF Chief of Staff, Gen. Eisenhower, and LTG Brereton detail the competition for the airborne army's resources. All correspondence can be found at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

execute.¹⁰² The First Allied Airborne Army lost the ideological competition over allocation of its resources as it awaited permission to launch TRANSFIGURE.¹⁰³ An ideological competition over resources constrained the airborne force; an ideological competition between the British and American Allies would complicate matters further.

The ideological competition between the leaders of the British and American Allies ensured the demise of some airborne operations.¹⁰⁴ The British considered themselves far more experienced than the Americans. After all, they had been fighting the war for five years. From the British perspective, they could learn little from the inexperienced American Allies. However, the British knew that without American support their chances of winning the war were dismal. The British idea of superiority over their American counterparts seems to have started from the initial entry of American forces in 1943 and probably continued through 1944.

The Americans, although newcomers to the war, considered themselves equal to the bloodied British. Since their entry into the war, Americans had brought innumerable resources to bear against the Axis powers. The efforts of their Allied partners seemed paltry in comparison.

¹⁰²Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 85; *Airborne Forces*. 211; Supreme Headquarters, “Msg From SHAEF Forward Eisenhower to AGWAR,” Although TRANSFIGURE’s cancellation has often been attributed to the speed of the Allied advance, these sources posit that TRANSFIGURE may have been canceled to reallocate more troop carriers in support of 12th AG resupply operations. The most telling piece of supporting evidence is Eisenhower’s response to the War Department which stated that “most of our air transport lift is being devoted to supplying Bradley, in order that his enveloping movement may continue at its present rapid tempo.”

¹⁰³Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*. New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1951, 527. The competition over the FAAA’s resources continued throughout the war. In March 1945, Bradley expressed his view by telling the FAAA Chief of Staff that he did not need any airborne operations and would rather use the FAAA aircraft for resupply of his maneuver forces.

¹⁰⁴Cirillo. Chapter one of Dr. Cirillo’s thesis, entitled “No Band of Brothers,” gives a detailed and sourced account of the friction between the British and American Allies.

From the American perspective, the British lacked the bold initiative to win the war. Only the resources and ingenuity of the American military could bring victory in the European Theater of Operations. Therefore, the Americans felt entitled to make the major decisions concerning the conduct of the war. The American idea of entitlement seems to have started from their initial entry into the war in 1943 and probably continued through 1944.

The ideological competition between British experience and American entitlement occurred throughout World War II. Although Eisenhower was able to rise above the rivalry, his subordinates did not. In fact, the British 18th Army Group Commander, General Sir Harold Alexander had offended the Americans in 1943 by his critical response to their performance at Kasserine. Montgomery was equally dismissive of their capabilities.¹⁰⁵ During the same year, Major General Browning, Eisenhower's airborne advisor, got off to a particularly bad start with Major General Ridgway, the 82nd Airborne Division Commander.¹⁰⁶ The difficulty between the two men began during the planning of Operation HUSKY. There were not enough aircraft to support both the British and American airborne divisions. In Ridgway's words: "A running argument developed with General Browning as to how these planes were to be allocated between my division and the British 1st Airborne Division."¹⁰⁷ The trouble between Browning and

¹⁰⁵Mead, 74. Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 2002), 398-399. D'Este gives an account of the British sentiment towards American fighting capabilities.

¹⁰⁶Mead, 74; Blair.

¹⁰⁷Matthew B Ridgway, and Harold H Martin, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway, As Told to Harold H. Martin* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 67. Additionally, Ridgway felt that Browning, from his post at Supreme Headquarters, was in a position to exert undue influence, both on allocation of aircraft to American airborne troops and on their tactical employment; Mead, 75. The friction between both men during the planning of HUSKY continued. Browning, using the authority of Eisenhower, made unannounced inspections of

Ridgway would continue throughout much of the war. The Americans, while not necessarily Anglophobic, remained suspicious of their British Allies and often sought an American advantage at all times.¹⁰⁸

The events that led up to Operation VARSITY clearly show the ideological competition between British expertise and American entitlement. Still reeling from the events of Operation MARKET, the Allies put Ridgway in charge of planning and executing Operations VARSITY and CHOKER II.¹⁰⁹ Although Montgomery's MARKET-GARDEN plan had failed, the Allies still placed priority on the northern thrust. Feeling that an airborne envelopment was essential to his operation, Montgomery personally requested that the Allies put Ridgway in charge of VARSITY. Ridgway repeatedly protested his assignment. He thought it would be more logical to put the British 1st Airborne Corps in charge of VARSITY planning, while leaving the American 18th Airborne Corps in charge of CHOKER II planning.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the higher headquarters ignored Ridgway's pleas, and his assignment remained. The British felt the priority that the Allies gave the northern thrust showed reverence for British expertise. Therefore, the Allies should afford the British the best airborne commander available. On the other hand, the Americans felt

Ridgway's division without consulting the commander. Additionally, Browning worsened the relationship by demanding to see Ridgway's plans for HUSKY. Ridgway's response was that no plans were available until General Patton, his boss, approved them. The situation rose to Eisenhower's level before his Chief of Staff, Walter Bedell Smith, made Ridgway back down. The damage was done and would affect the future relationship between Browning and Ridgway.

¹⁰⁸Ridgway, 75; Cirillo, 187. In general, Ridgway took issue with using the 18th Airborne Corps to support British forces.

¹⁰⁹See section 2, Planning Inefficiencies, of this monograph for descriptions of Operations VARSITY and CHOKER II.

¹¹⁰Clay, 434-435. Ridgway did his utmost to get out of his involvement in VARSITY, even turning over planning of the operation to the British 1st Airborne Corps Commander.

that since they supported both operations with two American airborne divisions, they were already assuming the majority of the burden. Therefore, they were entitled to the services of their best airborne commander. The tug-of-war between British experience and American entitlement slowed the planning of VARSITY and may have doomed the planning of CHOKER II.

Competing ideologies hampered the overall Allied airborne effort. There were ideological competitions between the War Department and the supreme headquarters, the airborne army and the army groups, and the British and American Allies themselves. The Allies were unable to overcome these ideologies throughout the war, and suffered because of them. The competing ideologies of the Allies caused the cancelation of some airborne operations.

CONCLUSION

The Allies struggled to harness the capabilities inherent in their relatively new airborne force. For numerous reasons, the Allied airborne effort of World War II provided mixed results. Therefore, the coalition did not execute all of its planning efforts. In total, the Allies considered eighteen separate airborne plans. Five reached the stage of detailed planning. Three progressed almost to the point of launching. None matured. The plans embraced a variety of objectives: the city of Tournai, to block Germans retreating from the Channel coast; the vicinity of Liege, to get the First Army across the Meuse River; the Aachen-Maastricht gap, to get Allied troops through the West Wall. The Allies did not execute these plans because of doctrinal deficiencies, planning inefficiencies, and competing ideologies in the coalition.

The deficiencies of the British and American airborne doctrine confounded airborne planners. The doctrine was deficient because of three primary reasons: the different doctrinal concepts derived from Operation HUSKY, the open interpretation of ill-defined doctrine, and the competition between internal airborne doctrine and external support doctrine. Each stakeholder's differing opinion on doctrine led to the downfall of at least four airborne operations.

The inefficiencies of the planning process did not assist the planners either. Allied planning was inefficient because of three primary reasons. First, the Allies failed to synchronize their planning efforts in time, space, and purpose between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, First Allied Airborne Army, and Army groups. Second, the Allies convoluted their planning process. Finally, the staff of the First Allied Airborne Army lacked unity of effort. Planning inefficiency caused the Allies to cancel some airborne operations.

The competing ideologies about the use of the airborne force and its resources also hampered the overall Allied airborne effort. Three ideological competitions are evident. First, there was an ideological competition between the War Department and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. Second, there was an ideological competition between the First Allied Airborne Army and the Army groups. Finally, there was an ideological competition between the British and American Allies themselves. The competing ideologies of the Allies caused the cancelation of some airborne operations as well.

Truly, the Allies had difficulty conducting the large-scale airborne operations of World War II. That experience may have implications for future airborne operations. As the United States military rebalances its efforts towards Asia, the service components have brought the terms anti-access and area denial to the forefront of the discussion.¹¹¹ In other words, the United States military recognizes that it may have to conduct large-scale forcible entry into a contested area against a near-peer competitor. Without a doubt, that future force will face many of the same

¹¹¹Anti-access (A2) is action intended to slow deployment of friendly forces into a theater or cause forces to operate from distances farther from the locus of conflict than they would otherwise prefer. A2 affects movement to a theater. Area denial (AD) is action intended to impede friendly operations within areas where an adversary cannot or will not prevent access. AD affects maneuver within a theater.

obstacles that the Allies of World War II faced. In today's environment, the United States military can ill-afford to suffer the growing pains of World War II's Allies. To increase its probability of success, the future joint coalition must integrate its forcible entry doctrine, synchronize its planning efforts, and overcome the competing ideologies of its interdependent parts.

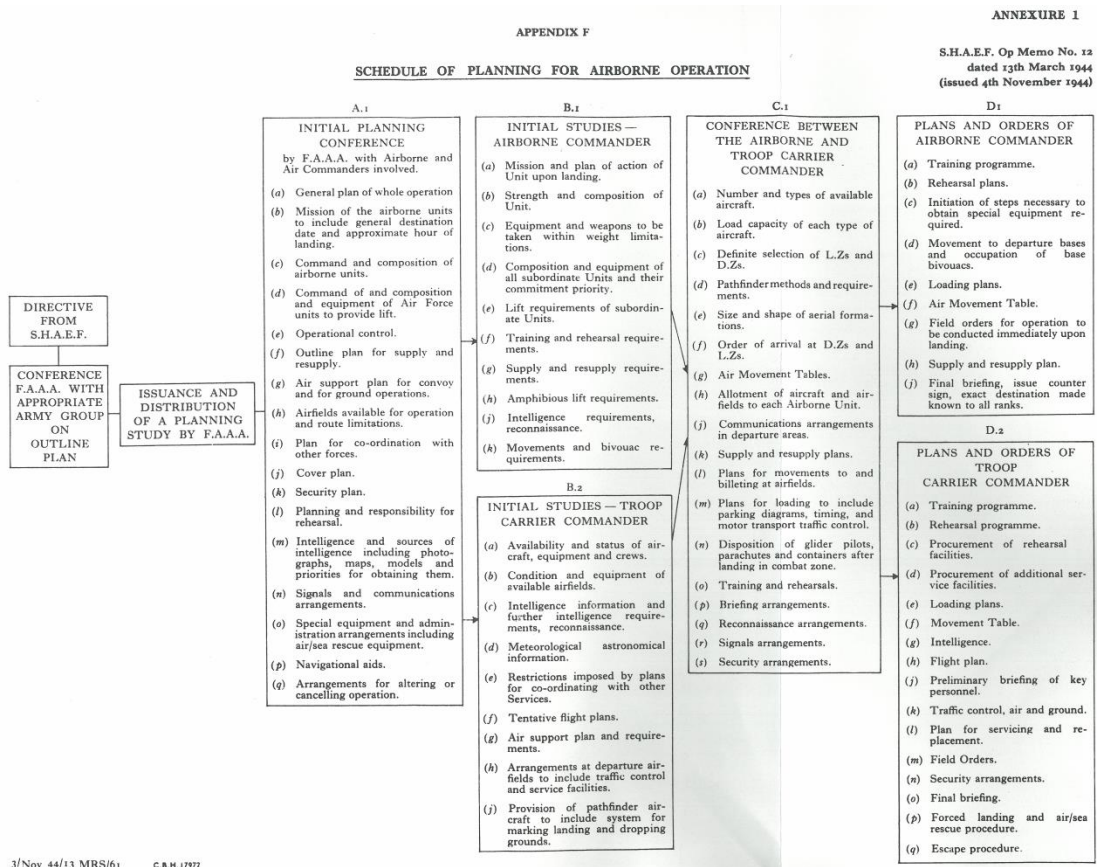


Figure 1. Schedule of Planning for Airborne Operations

Source: *Airborne Forces*, London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1990, ANNEXURE 1.

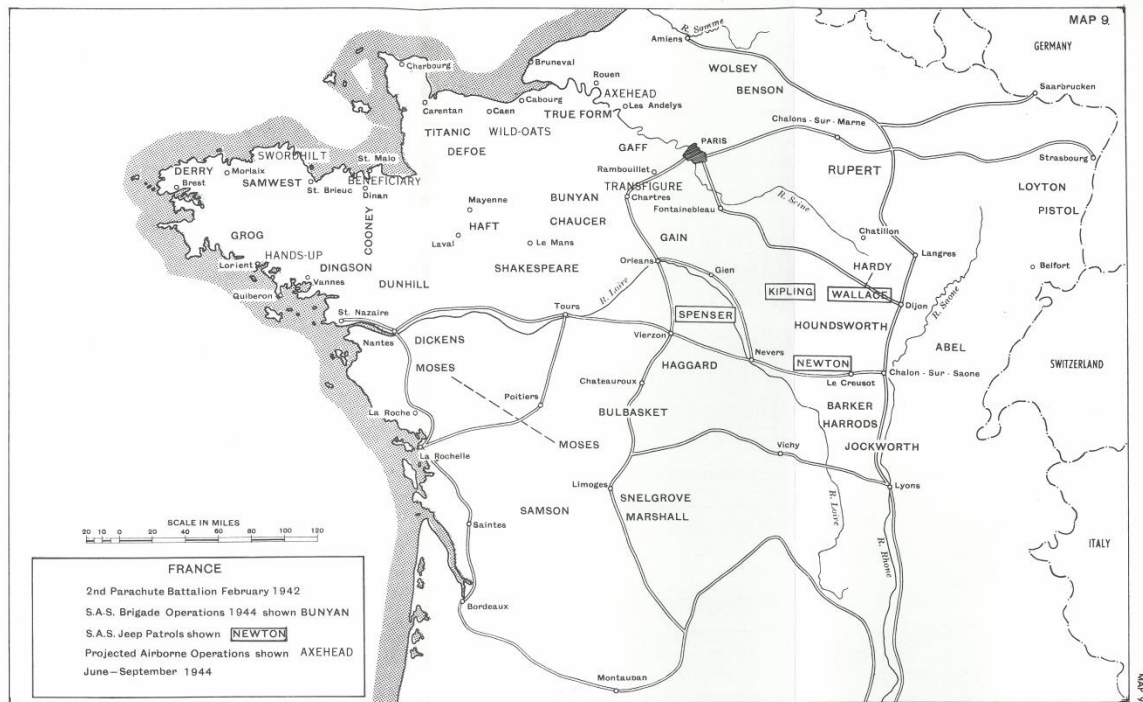


Figure 2. Operations in France

Source: *Airborne Forces*, London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1990, Map 9.



Figure 3. Operations in Holland and Belgium

Source: *Airborne Forces*, London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 1990, Map 10.

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